

## Mezzanine

By Pedro Vera



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Martin Melendez cursed as he realized he was late for the drop.

*If you could call it that. A drop used to be two guys in a public place trying to pass a package without a tail noticing. This is more like a joke.*

Martin's job was simple: every week at a seemingly random day, time and location he would take a walk. Somebody else would walk side-to-side for no more than a second or two, never closer than 3 feet.

Each of them held a cell phone capable of very short distance wireless data transfers. The phones were programmed to detect each other, so neither would have to risk getting a hand inside a pocket to activate a transfer.

It was literally impossible to detect, and even if electronic eavesdropping was used all they would detect was random noise since the transmissions were encrypted.

Of course, this would not help if Martin was late.

He strode out of his office building in the Woodmont Triangle, then noticed that he was just in time to catch the “8” trolley, a wooden-bodied bus that provided free trips thru downtown Bethesda in a figure-8 pattern. And it was timed in 8-minutes intervals.

Martin trotted to the bus stop in front of the Veteran’s monument, while wondering why the bus was not called the “88.”

*Who the fuck cares? Just catch it and you’ll be there on time!*

A few minutes later he was at the south most part of the bus route, in front of the Barnes & Noble bookstore. Martin remembered at the last second to not walk straight into the shop, and instead pull out his cell phone and act as if he was checking on his voice mail. This gave him a few seconds to see if he could recognize a tail.

There was nobody he could recognize.

Martin walked into the bookstore and took the escalators to the third floor.

Once at the top level he browsed the magazine racks, picked the current Wired Magazine and then walked over to the computer books section. His cover was a computer programmer, and he had the corporate credit card so he planned to grab a book to justify being away from the office.

He knew that as soon as he grabbed the book, his drop would walk by him and his cell phone would vibrate. That was the signal that the transfer was successful.

Martin did not even know what his drop would look like, it was better that way for security purposes.

Martin pulled a book on neural networks, and was puzzled when he felt movement behind him, but his cell phone did not vibrate. He resisted the urge to pull the phone out of his pocket.

*What the fuck?*

He turned around, and found himself inches from a man about his height, maybe in his mid 30’s.

“We have Peterson. Please hand over the phone and don’t make a scene.”

*Sweet Jesus!*

“I.. I am sorry sir, you must have mistaken me for somebody else.”

“Your name is Martin Melendez and you are an illegal agent of the government of the Republic of Puerto Rico, covering as a computer programmer. Do I have to say more?”

“The phone is useless by itself,” Martin blurted, then pulled the phone from his pocket and handed it over to the man.

“That is for us to decide. Come with me, they are waiting for us downstairs.”

“What if I don’t?”

“We got Peterson already, and you know what that means, don’t you?”

Martin nodded.

“Right after you.”

Martin headed for the escalators down to the ground level of the store. As soon as he stepped on the escalator he jumped over the rubber-covered motorized handrail and jumped down to the first level. The man cursed but did not run, he simply let the escalator bring him down to the first level.

Martin grunted in pain when he landed. When he saw that the man was not running after him, he decided it was time to bolt outside. He ran to the door, and as he opened it he felt a sharp pain in his neck, then everything went black.

The End

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